11th-hour Talks Try To Avert Dock Strike

Deadline Is This Morning

UPI, AP

SAN FRANCISCO — With this morning's strike deadline drawing close, negotiators held last ditch talks last night on a contract which could avert resumption of West Coast longshoremen's walkout.

Both sides were warned by federal mediator J. Curtis Counts that the Nixon administration will move quickly to force a settlement if 15,000 workers leave their posts at 24 ports in California, Washington and Oregon.

The International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU), which last summer accepted a strike deadline of 8 a.m. today, Representatives of both parties met separately for nearly three hours yesterday before recessing for lunch. They then held a four-hour session in which the ILWU made a contract proposal. There was no public response from the PMA.

When the bargainers recessed for dinner, Counts told newsmen: "You can't fool these guys — the thing may blow over like a kite or this whole thing may get settled."

The administration's No. 1 mediator later said: "Nobody's really thinking about an extension of the contract."

After a dinner break, both sides resumed their efforts to resolve the dispute. Counts warned that the administration would immediately ask Congress to force longshoremen back to work if they go on strike again.

"We'll be ready with a bill for Congress," said Counts, explaining it would send the dockers back to work and "either settle the terms of a contract or establish a mechanism for settling those terms."